

September 14, 2018

The Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak
Bishop of Grand Rapids
360 Division St.
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Your Excellency,

As we begin a new year of formation at Saint John Vianney College Seminary, our seminarians, priests and staff come together to pray, study, form, teach and work to build up the Body of Christ. We are filled with gratitude to Jesus Christ that he continues to call men to the priesthood to serve his Church.

As we learn more about revelations of sexual abuse of minors by ordained clergy, we also come together to pray for the victims of these crimes, to discuss the steps we are taking as a seminary community to ensure the health and safety of all, and to support our men on their journey toward priesthood.

I write to assure you that your seminarian's well-being is our greatest concern. He has said "yes" to the Lord; it is the duty and privilege of the seminary to help him discover the maturity and skills needed for service to Christ and his Church. He will receive excellent personal care and attention as he discerns this call through the priests and staff of Saint John Vianney College Seminary.

To alleviate any concerns you might have, I want to share with you the concrete steps we have taken over the years and are currently taking to make sure the seminary is a healthy, holy environment and that your seminarians have access to necessary resources should he need them.

- Under the leadership and oversight of our Board of Trustees, Saint John Vianney College Seminary has significantly strengthened its admissions, formation and evaluation processes. Throughout their time in formation, each seminarian has a team that includes an individual formator and spiritual director, which supports and evaluates his growth and development as he discerns priestly ministry.
- The seminary has increased the availability of confidential counseling, with an in-house psychologist who comes every week, as well as outside trusted Catholic counselors. Many of the seminarians choose to see a counselor at some point in formation as one more support for becoming a healthy, well-integrated man for ministry.
- Independent evaluators review admission requirements and ongoing screening of seminarians. External reports affirm the healthy culture of formation at SJV, as well as the quality of our policies and procedures as models of formation.

In light of the special circumstances this year, on September 5 we gathered as a seminary community to discuss the current crisis in the Church. At that meeting:

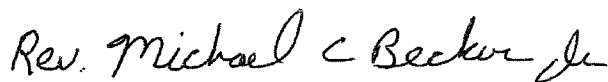
- We spoke to the seminarians and our whole community about the culture of transparency and moral accountability, which we promote at the seminary, and discussed how we seek to create a healthy environment where men can grow as they discern the priesthood. Anything contrary to this will not be tolerated.
- We informed the seminarians about the communication resources available to them and the reporting policies and procedures at the seminary and University of St. Thomas.
- We introduced them to Judge Timothy O'Malley, director of ministerial standards and safe environment for the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, and Mr. Tom Johnson, attorney and independent ombudsperson for the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Plan, who shared their services and support, as well as their contact information. Mr. O'Malley, who has broad experience in law enforcement, is responsible for making sure the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis follows its safe environment policies. Mr. Johnson is a former County Attorney and an independent resource available to help anyone who wants to bring something forward but needs support or advice in doing so.
- We spoke about ongoing opportunities for discussion about these issues throughout the academic year.

I want to reaffirm that Saint John Vianney College Seminary is committed to forming chaste men who hold one another accountable. It is the expectation that everyone involved in their formation live and act in ways that model the teachings of the Church.

As an additional resource, enclosed please find a recent *Catholic Spirit* article entitled "Is seminary safe?" (Sept. 11, 2018).

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. Let us continue to pray and work together for a spiritual renewal of the Church. Be assured of my ongoing prayers for you.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,



Very Reverend Michael C. Becker
Rector

cc: Reverend Ron Hutchinson